

ALBERT PASTOR AT HOME

***It's hard on the racketeers
when a big guy called Lefty
yearns to see his home town***

by DASHIELL HAMMETT

LEFTY comes in and drops his suitcase and kicks the door shut and says, "How's it, kid?"

I get up to shake hands with him and say, "How's it, Lefty?" and see he has got a goog or black eye that is maybe a week old and some new skin growing in alongside his jaw. I am too polite to stare at these things. I ask, "Well, how'd you find the old home town?"

"I just looked behind the railroad depot and there it was," he replies jokingly. "Is there anything in the bottom drawer?"

There is a bottle of Scotch in the bottom drawer. Lefty says it is not good Scotch because he does not want anybody to think he can be fooled by stuff that is made in this country, but he drinks it in a way that would not hurt the feelings of the man that made it in any country.

He unbuttons his vest and says, "Kid, I'm here to tell you it was one swell visit. This big city stuff is all oke, but when you go back to the place you was born and the kids you run around with and your family and—Say, kid, I got a kid brother that ain't eighteen yet and you ought to see him. Big as me except for weight and a couple inches of height and can he throw hands. When we put the gloves on down the cellar mornings—what a kid, kid! Even when I was in shape I would've had trouble holding him. You ought to see him, kid."

I think that it will be all right to refer to those things on Lefty's face now, so I say, "I'd like to. Why don't you bring him on? Any boy that can get to your mom like that ought—"

Lefty puts a hand to the eye that is not in as good shape as the other one and says, "That ain't his. That's—" He laughs and takes his hand away from his eyes and takes a jewelry box out of his coat pocket and passes it to me. "Take a look at that."

In the box there is a watch that looks like platinum attached to a chain that looks like platinum. I think they are.

Lefty says, "Read what's on it."

On the back of the watch it says *To Albert Pastor* (which is the way Lefty writes his name when he has to) *with the gratitude of the members of the Grocers' Protective Association.*

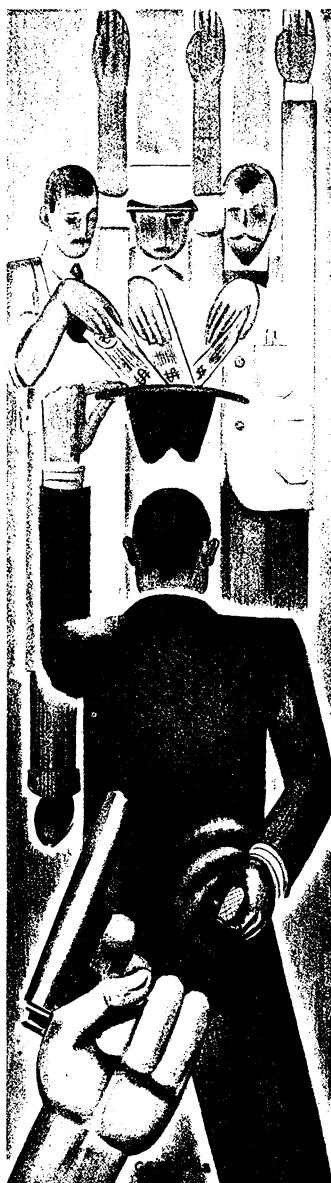
"Grocers' Protective Association," I say slowly, "that sounds like—"

"A racket!" he finishes for me and laughs and bangs my desk with his hand. "Call me a liar if you want, but back there in my home town, this little burg that ain't got a quarter million people in it—but get me right, a swell little burg just the same—they got racketeers!"

I would not want to call Lefty a liar even if I thought he was a liar because he would have been heavyweight champion of the world before he left the ring to go in business with me if they did not have rules you are supposed to fight by in the ring and if he did not have a temper which kept him

forgetting they had rules you were supposed to fight by. So I say, "Is that so?"

Lefty says that is so. He says, "You could've knocked me over with the District Attorney's office. Big city stuff back there! Ain't that a howl? And my old man being



shook down along with the rest of them." He reaches for the bottle of Scotch that he says is not good.

"Your old man is a grocer?" I ask.

"Uh-huh, and he always wanted me to follow in his own footsteps," Lefty says, "and that's the real reason he didn't have no use for my mystic career. But that's all right now—now that I retired from the arena. He's a swell old guy when you're old enough to understand him and we got along fine. I give him a sedan and you'd ought to see the way he carries on about it. You'd think it was a Dusenberg."

"Was it?" I ask.

Lefty says, "No, but you'd think it was a Rolls the way he carries on about it. Well, I'm there a couple days and he lets off about these bums that'd been lining up the grocers round town—join the protective association or else, with not many takers for the else. It seems the grocer business ain't none too good by its own self and paying alimony to these mugs don't help it none. The old man's kind of worried."

"I don't say nothing to him, but I go off by myself and do some thinking and I think, what's the matter with me going to see these babies and ask them do they want to listen to reason or have I got to go to work on them? I can't see nothing wrong with that idea. Can you?"

"No, Lefty," I say, "I can't."

"Well, neither could I," Lefty says, "and so I did and they don't think they want to listen to reason. There's a pair of them in the protective association office when I come in—just about what I expected—they know the words, but they ain't got the motions right yet. There was a third one come in after awhile, but I'm sweating good by that time and handy pieces has been broke off some of the furniture, so I make out all right, and the old man and some of the others get together and buy me this souper with some of the dues they'd've had to pay next month if there'd been any protective association left."

He puts the watch and chain back in the box and carefully puts the box back in his pocket. "And how's your father's horse?" he asks.

I take the envelope with the money in it out of my pocket and give it to him. "There's your end," I say, "only Caresse's not in. You know—the little fat guy around on Third avenue."

"I know him," Lefty says. "What's the matter with him?"

"He says he's paid so much for protection now that he's got nothing left to protect," I say, "and he won't stand for the boot."

Lefty says, "So?" He says, "That's the way, soon's I get out of town these babies think they can cut up." He stands up and buttons his vest. "Well," he says, "I guess I'll go round to see that baby and ask him does he want to listen to reason or have I got to go to work on him?"